President’s Message

Transitions. We always search for ways to manage the transitions from the madness of the cafeteria to the seriousness of the classroom, the transitions from one activity to another within the classroom, and the transitions from one set of students to another as the makeup of classrooms change. At the most recent CCSS Board meeting I announced that I would not be running for reelection as president, meaning that we as a group need to manage this transition in our professional organization. This one should be easy.

I am always impressed by the number of teachers who have given so much of their time in dedication to our profession. Out of a love of what happens in the social studies classroom and a deep concern for preparing our students to enter the future with the tools they need to make it their own, so many of Connecticut’s teachers have realized that what we do as professionals for each other helps our students as well. So many of these fellow professionals have found the time to help lead CCSS over the years. Many of you know CCSS through The Yankee Post and the annual Fall Conference. But behind these two very public signs of what CCSS provides are a host of people who over the years have processed the finances, made sure the organization completed paperwork for the state, kept the minutes (continued on page 2)

Editors’ Note

Much of the conference season has passed – NERC is still up the road a bit – and we must note that the developments we so confidently forecast in our September “Editors’ Note” have yet to come to pass. We had promised the likelihood of release of the Social Studies “Common Core” no later than the NCSS conference in mid-November. Not to be! There appears to have been a delay in release with specific causes not stated. A session at NCSS in Seattle noted the difficulties of bringing all the components of the disciplines that make up the social studies “field” into alignment/agreement. Thus we were left with a set of general statements and broad themes; to some of us with long memories it seemed as if we had seen this movie before. One thing was clear from the session: there will be no content specific standards coming out of “Common Core”. If you are looking for a mandate for what to teach at grade 7, look elsewhere. As the co-chairs of the Connecticut Social Studies Framework committee we are pleased that the emphasis seems likely to be on inquiry, skills and content-area reading and writing.

One came away from a session like this with a certain unease. There was some rumbling about the failure to release the full document; many had come to Seattle fully expecting to “get the word”. There was some defensiveness on the part of the committee members; they stated they are under pressure to “get it right”. What “right” might mean, and “right for whom” are unanswered questions. If there was an elephant in the room, it was the occasional comment that social studies has been “dissed” in all the common core activity of the last few years with all the emphasis on reading, writing and STEM. Forgive us if we sound a bit churlish, but America has just finished a contentious election, there’s talk of going over some “fiscal cliff”, the Middle East is in turmoil, North Korea is testing more long range missiles and Europe is still clawing its way out of its part of the world-wide recession. And social studies needs to beg for a place at the academic table!? Steve Armstrong’s column on page 3 sheds as much light on all this as he can at this time. Maybe by NERC in the spring, we’ll know more about where all this is going and what the implications are for the Connecticut Social Studies Framework – still a draft after three years. (continued on page 2)
of the meetings, organized the web site, and did the countless other items that all have to be done to keep CCSS afloat and thriving. It is because I know a little of our history that I know that our future is bright. In my last few months at the helm, I’d like to help shape some of that future.

With that in mind, at this most recent Board meeting I also announced a new position with CCSS: Legislative Liaison. As a member of our Public Affairs Committee, this liaison will be the primary organizer of our efforts to bring our concerns to members of the Connecticut General Assembly. We know as students of history that seldom have groups been able to create change without first organizing themselves. Given the attacks on teachers, education, and the social studies, we can no longer keep up a conversation with ourselves. We need to organize and carry our concerns to those who make policy without first thinking of checking with those who know most what our students need. For the rest of this academic year I will take on this role to get things started, but I need your help.

PLEASE, send along the names and districts of your Connecticut representative and state senator. I’m sure you know who they are, but if you want to check your district numbers you can do so here: http://www.cga.ct.gov/asp/menu/CGAFindLeg.asp

THEN, please send them along to me (tullyj@ccsu.edu), along with your name. We will then put together a master list of our members’ districts and plan a STAND UP FOR SOCIAL STUDIES email and phone day for early in 2013.

My transition out of the office of the president will be easy. Our transition into a major force in the state on behalf of our students, well . . . for that we need to work together.

Have a safe and joyous holiday season.

John Tully

(continued from page 1) All this said, kudos to Pam Hamad and her committee for a fine CCSS conference in October. For those who attended it was a day very well spent. The national conference in Seattle included a marvelous array of speakers and one incredibly moving event: a naturalization ceremony for twenty students and teachers who had come from some fourteen countries (see photo on left). Picture 2,500 people in the audience – few, if any, dry-eyed – with taped video from President Obama and a welcoming speech from Gerda Weissmann Klein, herself a Nazi concentration camp survivor, naturalized U.S. citizen and prominent author. If you ever want to know what America is all about, this forty-five minute experience was the ultimate social studies lesson. It was a privilege to be there. Pictures from both conferences can be found on pages 4 and 5.

We have some goodies in this issue. See page 7 for a report on Nebraska’s social studies standards experience – like Connecticut, still a work in progress. For a special treat, see excerpts (page 8) from an article on the history of Philadelphia sewers; the next time one of your students suggests what history is “full of” you can assign this article! We have an interesting article from a colleague – teaching in Westbrook - on his innovative approach to teaching about the recent election (see page 9-10) All this and more for your professional reading pleasure – enjoy. We hope this article will inspire more of you to use these pages to share the best of what you do.

Finally, we wish you a safe and restful holiday season; see you in ’13.
Tim - thomas.weinland@uconn.edu
Dan - danielcoughlin@charter.net
This year’s NCSS conference at Seattle was fantastic, with many outstanding workshops and special presentations. What I would like to turn your attention to now is the 2013 NCSS conference, that will take place in St. Louis from November 22-24. I am the co-chair of this conference, and I promise you that it will be excellent. The main theme of the conference will be the common core; we are encouraging sessions on how to integrate the teaching of history and literature. We will also two prominent subthemes: sports and history, and popular culture and history. We hope to appeal to both beginning and experienced social studies teachers. Workshop proposals will be available in a week or so at the NCSS website. St. Louis is very easy to get to, and I hope to see a number of folks from Connecticut in attendance.

One disappointing thing about the NCSS conference is that the promised Common Core social studies standards were not “rolled out” at this conference, as was promised. For the record, the document is called “College, Career and Civic Life: Framework for Inquiry in Social Studies State Standards”. The target audience for this document is state leaders who are looking to upgrade their social studies standards. The Framework does not include everything that must be included in a robust set of state social studies standards. The document focuses on student expectations, not instructional approaches and pedagogy; its language focuses on what students need to do, not what teachers need to do. The Framework will have explicit alignment with the Common Core literacy standards in social studies.

Why the delay in the release of this document? The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) has been one of the supporters of the creation of this document from the beginning. This group is now the official sponsor of the Framework document. This is definitely a good thing: the document will now go out to all fifty states, instead of the 22 states who were originally affiliated with the Standard document. However, before CCSSO releases the document they want to review it internally one more time; thus the delay of its release. CCSSO will be working with the states and others to build upon their efforts over the last few years to produce a final resource for states to consider when upgrading their own standards in social studies.

The Framework document will focus primarily on inquiry and civic engagement and on supporting the disciplinary literacy standards in the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, & Technical Subjects. A draft of the document will be shared with targeted groups of educators and education leaders for feedback prior to the release by CCSSO in 2013.

Hopefully, this has provided some background on the status of the Framework document. I will let you know when more information is available. I hope you will consider presenting a workshop and attending the NCSS National Conference next year in St. Louis.

Steve Armstrong
President-Elect
National Council for the Social Studies
Dates to Remember

April 8-10, 2013  -  NERC 44     Sturbridge, Mass.
June 25-July 1, 2013  -  International Social Studies Conference     Fez, Morocco

For additional information on Morocco see page 12 and http://www.socialstudies.org/morocco2013
NCSS National Conference
Seattle, 2012

Clockwise from upper right:
Sheryl WuDunn
Exhibit Scenes
Naturalization Oath
Two “National Treasures”: Sandra Day O’Connor and Gerda Weismann Klein
Rick Steves
Steve Armstrong in charge
Fiction vs. nonfiction smackdown

By Jay Mathew, Published: October 17, 2012

There is no more troubling fact about U.S. education than this: The reading scores of 17-year-olds have shown no significant improvement since 1980.

The new Common Core State Standards in 46 states and the district are designed to solve that problem. Among other things, students are being asked to read more nonfiction, considered by many experts to be the key to success in college or the workplace.

The Common Core standards are one of our hottest trends. Virginia declined to participate but was ignored in the rush of good feeling about the new reform. Now, the period of happy news conferences is over, and teachers have to make big changes. That never goes well. Expect battles, particularly in this educationally hypersensitive region.

Teaching more nonfiction will be a key issue. Many English teachers don’t think it will do any good. Even if it were a good idea, they say, those who have to make the change have not had enough training to succeed — an old story in school reform.

The clash of views is well described by two prominent scholars for the Pioneer Institute, a Boston-based public policy group, in a new paper. Sandra Stotsky of the University of Arkansas and Mark Bauerlein of Emory University say the reformers who wrote the Common Core standards have no data to support their argument that kids have been hurt by reading too much fiction. They say analyzing great literature would give students all the critical thinking skills they need. The problem, they say, is not the lack of nonfiction but the dumbed-down fiction that has been assigned in recent decades.

“Problems in college readiness stem from an incoherent, less-challenging literature curriculum from the 1960s onward,” Bauerlein and Stotsky say. “Until that time, a literature-heavy English curriculum was understood as precisely the kind of pre-college training students needed.”

The standards were inspired, in part, by a movement to improve children’s reading abilities by replacing standard elementary school pabulum with a rich diet of history, geography, science and the arts. University of Virginia scholar E.D. Hirsch Jr. has written several books on this. He established the Core knowledge Foundation in Charlottesville to support schools that want their third-graders studying ancient Rome and their fourth-graders listening to Handel.

Robert Pondiscio, a former fifth-grade teacher who is vice president of the foundation, quotes a key part of the Common Core standards making this case:

“By reading texts in history/social studies, science, and other disciplines, students build a foundation of knowledge in these fields that will also give them the background to be better readers in all content areas. Students can only gain this foundation when the curriculum is intentionally and coherently structured to develop rich content knowledge within and across grades.”

The Common Core guidelines recommend fourth-graders get an equal amount of fiction and nonfiction. Eighth-grade reading should be about 55 percent nonfiction, going to a recommended 70 percent by 12th grade.

Bauerlein and Stotsky say that could hurt college readiness. The new standards and associated tests, they say, will make “English teachers responsible for informational reading instruction, something they have not been trained for, and will not be trained for unless the entire undergraduate English major as well as preparatory programs in English education in education schools are changed.”

Pondiscio says he admires Bauerlein and Stotsky and doesn’t see why English classes have to carry the nonfiction weight. Social studies and science courses can do that. The real battle, he says, will be in the elementary schools, where lesson plans have failed to provide the vocabulary, background knowledge and context that make good readers.

Those who want the new standards say learning to read is more than just acquiring a skill, like bike riding. It is absorbing an entire world. That is what the fight in your local district will be about.

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Talk about a firestorm.

The first revision of the state’s social studies standards in two decades generated a response that dwarfs any feedback -- in both numbers and fervor -- of earlier revisions of state standards in math, language arts or science. More than 1,000 people filled out an online survey on the Nebraska Department of Education website that closed Wednesday. Many others wrote emails or sent letters. That’s understandable: A math equation is a math equation, but history, civics, geography and economics -- the four areas covered in the social studies standards -- are ripe for interpretation. And passionate opinions.

Two of the lightning rods: climate change (actually the whole section known as “human geography”) and American Exceptionalism. The latter -- a highly politicized term that focuses on America’s unique form of government (some would substitute the term “superior”) -- isn’t in the standards. But the idea that it should be drew dozens of people to public meetings and prompted a coalition of conservative groups to offer alternative standards they say are less vague and open to interpretation.

On the other hand, a large chunk of the geography standards are highlighted in yellow to denote that they are “undergoing continuing revision or possible removal.” That shocked Randy Bertolas, a geography professor at Wayne State College, who helped draft the geography portion of the standards. Bertolas said the committee of educators who drafted the standards modeled them after national standards developed by a consortium of geography organizations. They thought they had a good document that might need a little tweaking. “But outright gutting them, it just astonished me,” he said. “I and a number of other people were quite frankly horrified by the amount and content of what was highlighted.”

Bertolas contacted members of a Nebraska geographic educators group, as well as national geographic organizations and encouraged them to respond to the survey. A number of national groups have weighed in, advocating for the highlighted content: the National Geographic Society, the National Center for Science Education, the Association of American Geographers, the National Council on Geographic Education.

The alternative standards proposed by the coalition, which includes the former executive director of Boys Town, removes climate change and other elements of the human geography section. Just how the board will handle the highlighted portions -- there’s a wide gap between revision and removal -- remains to be seen.

Board member Bob Evnen said some on the board’s committee were concerned about the approach to climate change -- accepting as fact that it is manmade -- and the overall vagueness of the standards that don’t provide enough guidance for teachers. “What some board members do not want to do is provide a vehicle through which teachers are unbounded in the delivery of political positions,” he said. But he’s hoping to come to a conclusion satisfactory to everyone.

Bertolas hopes that means the highlighted sections stay put. Geography is a truly integrative discipline that blends information from different fields and “confronts the considerable problems that the world faces today, and explores real solutions for the planet,” he said. He thinks issues of climate change should be part of that, even if adults can’t agree on its meaning or veracity. “I’m trying to advocate for the children of Nebraska,” he said. “I’m not advocating against the adults.”

Over the next week, the committees that drafted the standards will review the public comments and make further revisions. Then the board committee will take a crack at it. On Thursday, the state board of education will discuss it, and it is scheduled for a vote on Friday.


Join CCSS - See Membership Form - page 12
Documenting the Underground: Philly’s sewer historian

November 27, 2012   By Carolyn Beeler

Nearly 3,000 miles of sewers wind underneath Philadelphia’s streets. They make modern life possible in the homes and skyscrapers above, but go largely unnoticed. Except, that is, by one man whose job it is to uncover what the city looked like before they were there. Enter Adam Levine, a historical consultant for the Philadelphia Water Department. Levine is so fascinated by the network of sewers transporting waste away from the city that he has been researching the underground maze part-time for more than a decade. He got his job after taking a sewer tour and writing about it, so he agreed to accompany me on a tour of my own, which led us underneath Algard Street in the Northeast.

The brick sewer was tall enough to stand in comfortably, and about four inches of gray water rushed by our rubber boots. It was humid and sticky, and smelled only mildly of sewage. Sewer maintenance inspector Kevin Bess took the lead on the tour. He stopped during our block-long walk underground to point out a softball-sized opening in the wall of the sewer, at about eye level: the opening of what’s called a lateral pipe. “This is the last pipe that brings all the used water from your home,” Bess said.

I asked what happened if that house flushed the toilet while we were looking at it. “Move out the way,” Bess replied. “Whatever they flushing, is coming down into the sewer.” Bess has been walking, and sometimes crawling, through Philadelphia’s sewers for 16 years. So he doesn’t tend to linger underground. “You want to come down here, find out what’s going on, and get out of here as soon as possible,” Bess said.

A fascination with underground streams
Back on the surface, Algard Street is quiet. Levine, who had been down in the sewers only twice before, is already waiting on the sidewalk. His reaction afterward has been the same each time, he said. “I come up and I look up at the closed man hole and I look at the street and I can’t believe where I’ve just been,” Levine said. Levine said he partly likes going into the sewers because not many people can. Largely, he is fascinated by how what is there now compares to what used to be.

“This sewer was built in 1915 and before that there was a stream meandering more or less down Algard Street, there was a pond right up stream near Tyson Street,” he said, referencing the hand-drawn historical map in his hands. He points to a stream that used be where the street now is. It was routed underground to make a sewer, a common practice as Philadelphia was being built. A similar underground stream first piqued his interest in the sewer system back in the 1980s. He had been working in a community garden in West Philadelphia when he was told that the houses that had once stood there had been undermined by an underground stream. “I couldn’t believe that a stream would have been put in a sewer,” Levine said. “I couldn’t comprehend that.”

A child of the 1970s, Levine remembers celebrating the first Earth Day. He seems a bit wounded on behalf of those creeks. “I couldn’t figure out why anybody would want to do that to a stream,” Levine said.

Wounded but fascinated
In 1997, Levine went into that West Philly sewer to write an article for City Paper. The water department liked it so much, they offered him a job as a part-time archivist. Spokeswoman Joanne Dahme said the lectures Levine has given on what specific neighborhoods used to look like are especially popular. “We have found that history is a fantastic hook,” Dahme said. It helps people understand, for example, why it matters that their house is on top of a former stream bed. “People will say to us, ‘Oh, I have a better understanding about why my basement is wet all the time.’

The city seen through a different lens
Levine’s research usually takes place high above the sewers, in his Center City office, where more than 20,000 reference documents sit in cardboard boxes, on book shelves and in filing cabinets. Levine said after years spent looking at historical views of the city, walking around is a little different than it used to be. He’s constantly on the lookout for slight depressions and elevations of the land. Evidence, he knows, of hilltops being shaved off. The dirt likely was carted away to fill in low-lying streams and valleys.

“What I see is I see the city as a whole series of cuts and fills and missing pieces,” Levine said. “Anything natural was a problem in any city that has a grid of streets, because the grid doesn’t bend and nature is not rectangular.” Now, Levine’s work will help bring this man-made system a bit closer to nature. His records will help Philadelphia place rain gardens and reservoirs in the right locations as part of a new green storm water management plan.

Every four years social studies educators have the chance to share the process of the presidential election with our students. The presidential election season brings about a unique environment that sparks the interests of students in the political process and the important issues that are currently facing the country. This year was no exception. The vast majority of my students, both sophomores and seniors, were very interested in the candidates running for the presidency as well as the issues that are currently facing our country. For my civics students at Westbrook High School, I developed a plan to make the American political process a more interactive experience. This was not simply an effort in my classroom. The entire social studies department at Westbrook High School collaborated to give our students an interesting, intensive, challenging, and memorable educational experience centering on the presidential election of 2012.

In Civics classes students created election information guides either online or as guidebooks. The non-partisan guidebooks were designed to give the students as much unbiased information as possible so they could be fully informed on the candidates and the issues. In senior honors history classes, students coordinated a school wide effort to inform the school of the important issues and the candidates’ positions on those key ideas, most notably through the creation of a display case. (see picture on page 10) In American history classes, students were involved in in-class and out-of-class discussion on the key issues and election process. In other classes, the election was a current topic that came up again and again. These activities prepared students for a school-wide mock election that was tied into a national, online mock election administered by the Youth Leadership Initiative.

The presidential candidate debates, events that spark a lot of interest from students, provided exciting opportunities to discuss the process as it unfolded. During the first debate I used Edmodo.com to live blog the debate with my 10th and 12th grade students. The students were required to reply to two of my comments and post at least two comments. This proved to be a great success. The students managed to create over 250 replies and comments during the 90 minute debate. Below are examples from the live blog discussion that took place during the first debate:

Me - Should the federal government or state government end their role in education...this is an interesting topic. Traditionally it has been the state’s job but more and more recently, the federal government is getting involved.
• Oct 3, 2012
M.M. - I think that the state government should be in control unless it’s obvious that something’s going wrong. Then the federal government should intervene.
• Oct 3, 2012
F. C. - Ya I agree with M. let the state government control the state unless they need help.
• Oct 3, 2012
Ma. F. - The state government should focus on the details and the federal government should focus on the larger issues that affect all US schools.
• Oct 3, 2012
J. L. - I personally believe that the government should handle education with a “laissez faire” approach, and leave the majority of the control to the states. However, they should set regulations for all of America, and whether a state wishes to exceed these goals will be up to them, depending on economic and budgeting limits.
• Oct 3, 2012
K. L. to Per 6 Civics
I liked Obama’s final statement better.. it was more powerful. I liked how he addressed that he’s not perfect and how he fights 100% of the time, and if reelected, he will continue to do the same. I feel like his statement will be remembered more and leave a lasting impression in people’s minds.
• Oct 3, 2012
M. F. - I agree.
• Oct 3, 2012
L. S. - I agree, Obama admits he has flaws and no one is the perfect president, while Romney makes a lot of promises he will not be able to keep.
• Oct 3, 2012
S. C. - I also agree. Barack Obama admitted to the fact that he is not perfect, but will do everything in his ability to improve America.

After discussing my assignment with Brian Dailey, one of my social studies teacher colleagues, he created an Election 2012 group using Edmodo.com. He then made me a co-teacher on the site and posted it on the Social Studies Forum site. For the town hall presidential debate we collaborated for a new live blogging discussion. This time students discussed the debate with not only their classmates, but all social studies students in Westbrook High School. In addition, because of Mr. Dailey’s post on the Social Studies Forum, students from at least three other schools joined the discussion as well. This unique opportunity allowed our students to see what students from other parts of the country thought about the candidates and how the debates were impacting their views. There were interactive polls and instant feedback from their peers and teachers alike. The fast paced discussion involved over 60 students and was very continued on page 10
interesting. It was clear from the start that the students took to the format of this activity quickly and produced a tremendous amount of feedback and commentary as the debate progressed. In most instances students find political discussion and debates dry and difficult to follow. It is remarkable how this activity sparked the interest of students.

The in-class debrief after the online discussion proved to be just as captivating. The students arrived in class prepared and eager to discuss the previous night’s debate. For the students who had a difficult time understanding parts of the debate, the discussion provided an opportunity to have their questions answered. Other students were able to make important points regarding the candidates’ demeanor, appearance, and overall performance in the debate. There were also interesting discussions of bias and the students’ approach when watching the debate.

These are exciting times to be involved in education. There are more tools and more opportunities for collaboration than ever before. Part of what makes it so exciting, and at some times intimidating, is that with each day the technology and the system seems to change. When teachers work together there can only be positive benefits for both the teachers and students. Taking a chance on a project like live blogging a Presidential Debate, using a website we knew little about, was somewhat risky. I am fortunate to work with colleagues willing to try. Through excellent collaboration, we provided our students with an experience that they will hopefully remember for years to come.
International Exchange and Research Opportunities for U.S. Classroom Teachers

The U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs offers Fulbright grants for U.S. primary and secondary classroom teachers, guidance counselors, curriculum specialists, curriculum heads, Talented and Gifted coordinators, Special Education coordinators and media specialists/librarians to participate in professional development opportunities abroad through the Fulbright Classroom Teacher Exchange (CTE) Program.

Teachers may apply to the CTE Program in one of six countries: the Czech Republic, France, Hungary, India, Mexico and the United Kingdom. Teachers may apply to the DA Program in one of eight countries: Argentina, Finland, India, Mexico, Morocco, Singapore, South Africa and the United Kingdom.

For more information about eligibility requirements, benefits and impact of these programs, please visit the program website, www.fulbrightteacherexchange.org. Teachers interested in applying to the CTE Program can find more information here: http://www.fulbrightteacherexchange.org/application-te2.

The application deadline for the CTE Program is October 15, 2013.

International Social Studies Conference-Fez, Morocco

Education for Democracy and the Arab World
An NCSS International Conference in the Kingdom of Morocco
June 25 – July 1, 2013

Understanding the Near East and the dramatic events of the Arab Spring are important content for today’s social studies classrooms. Whether it is the democratic revolutions in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia or the push for reforms in Morocco, the people of these North African countries have taken a stand for freedom and democracy. This is just the latest chapter in the centuries-old history of human occupation of these lands that stretch back before the Roman Empire.

Join NCSS, in partnership with Maryville University of St. Louis and the Moroccan Center for Civic Education, in Fez, Morocco next summer for Education for Democracy and the Arab World to get a first-hand understanding of the issues and region. http://www.socialstudies.org/morocco2013

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- Opportunity to meet colleagues and develop a network of professional friends and associates
- Ability to keep up-to-date with developments in the social studies.

If you have always wanted to become a member of NCSS, now is the time to act. New membership subscriptions to NCSS will also give you membership benefits from Connecticut Council for the Social Studies for one year—a $20 savings. This offer applies to only new NCSS Regular or new Comprehensive members only who send in their form to CCSS. Joint member benefits include:
- All CCSS benefits
- Regular and Comprehensive membership in NCSS includes a subscription to Social Education or Social Studies and the Young Learner
- NCSS Comprehensive membership also includes all bulletins published during the membership year.

Please complete membership form. Make checks payable to CCSS and mail this form to CCSS, P.O. Box 5031, Milford, CT 06460.

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